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Texas' opportunity to lead; Muslims, immigrants welcome

Austin – Sen. José Rodríguez, Chairman of the Senate Democratic Caucus, issued the following statement:

Today is Texas Muslim Capitol Day, and I for one welcome the visits. In my office, we don't see Muslims or immigrants as threats. Religious freedom is a core American principle, and to target those of a particular faith with a broad brush is antithetical to our values.

Immigrants come seeking an opportunity to better their lives in a country whose founding document holds "all men are created equal" and promises "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" for all. With the exception of a few, all Americans were once immigrants. As in the past, today's immigrants enrich our culture and are vital to our economy; in that, we are all in this together.

We saw that this weekend when, from Texas' DFW to airports around the country, thousands of Americans rallied in reaction to the chaos of an ill-planned, un-American, and most likely illegal executive order that many experts say will make us less safe at home and endanger Americans stationed or traveling abroad.

No person in America has been killed by a terror attack by people from those countries, and the order did not address travelers from other countries that are known sponsors of terror, such as Saudi Arabia, where most of the 9-11 terrorists came from. Nor did the order address people from countries where the President has known business interests.

With this order, the President doesn't build on our American values of inclusion, tolerance, and diversity but rather he stokes fear and sows division. Ironically, the order was signed on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Thankfully, after a day of turmoil that dimmed the light of freedom we project to the world, federal judges in New York, Virginia, Massachusetts, and Washington issued temporary stays on the order, Media reports indicate lack of clarity and communication between the administration and the agencies charged with carrying out the order. What happened is not clear, and neither is what's next.

This order was just the latest in a week of reckless actions taken by the new administration. The President put American taxpayers on the hook for billions of dollars to build an unnecessary "wall" on the border, targeted immigrants for mass deportations, and then may have started a trade war with Mexico, Texas' closest international business partner, which would be catastrophic for businesses and consumers.

Texas depends on immigrants for its economic vitality, from those who pick crops to those who create technology. The President's first week in office was an attack on the people and policies that have helped Texas diversify its economy, on the soul of our nation of immigrants, and on our heart for those searching for a beacon of welcome. We reject these policies of fear.

On Thursday, Texans will get their first look at the trickle down effects of such attitudes on the Texas Legislature, as we debate a so-called "sanctuary cities" bill. This is an unnecessary proposal that does nothing to make us safer, will hurt business, and place communities under a cloud of suspicion.

We have defeated similar proposals in the past, but this is the first time that we will consider the proposal under a backdrop of a President recklessly targeting immigrants and minorities. The Texas Legislature cannot follow in his footsteps.

Last session, Muslim visitors were greeted by some legislators with demands that they sign loyalty oaths. Today, and every day, we must stand up against fear and bigotry with a Texas-size welcome.

José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Texas Senate Democratic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Agriculture, Water and Rural Affairs (Vice Chair); Natural Resources and Economic Development; Transportation, and Veterans Affairs and Border Security.